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# IN PRAISE OF LEGEND

E. E. Holmes

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*the holy Cross is found by S. Helena."*

# In Praise of Legend

BY THE VENERABLE

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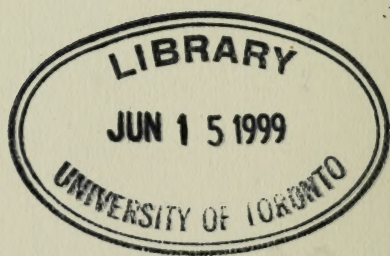
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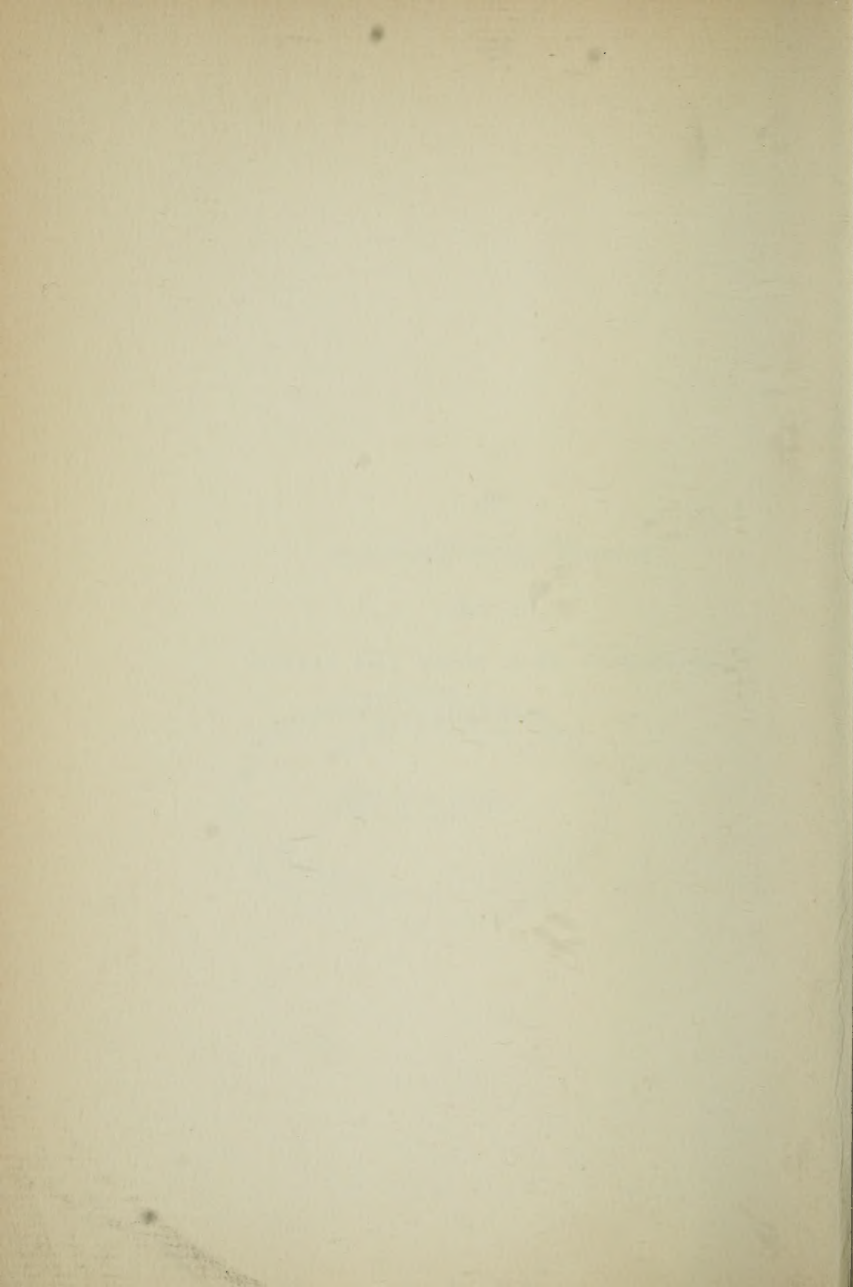
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TO  
MOTHER MARY GERTRUDE  
OF THE  
COMMUNITY OF S. MARY THE VIRGIN  
WANTAGE







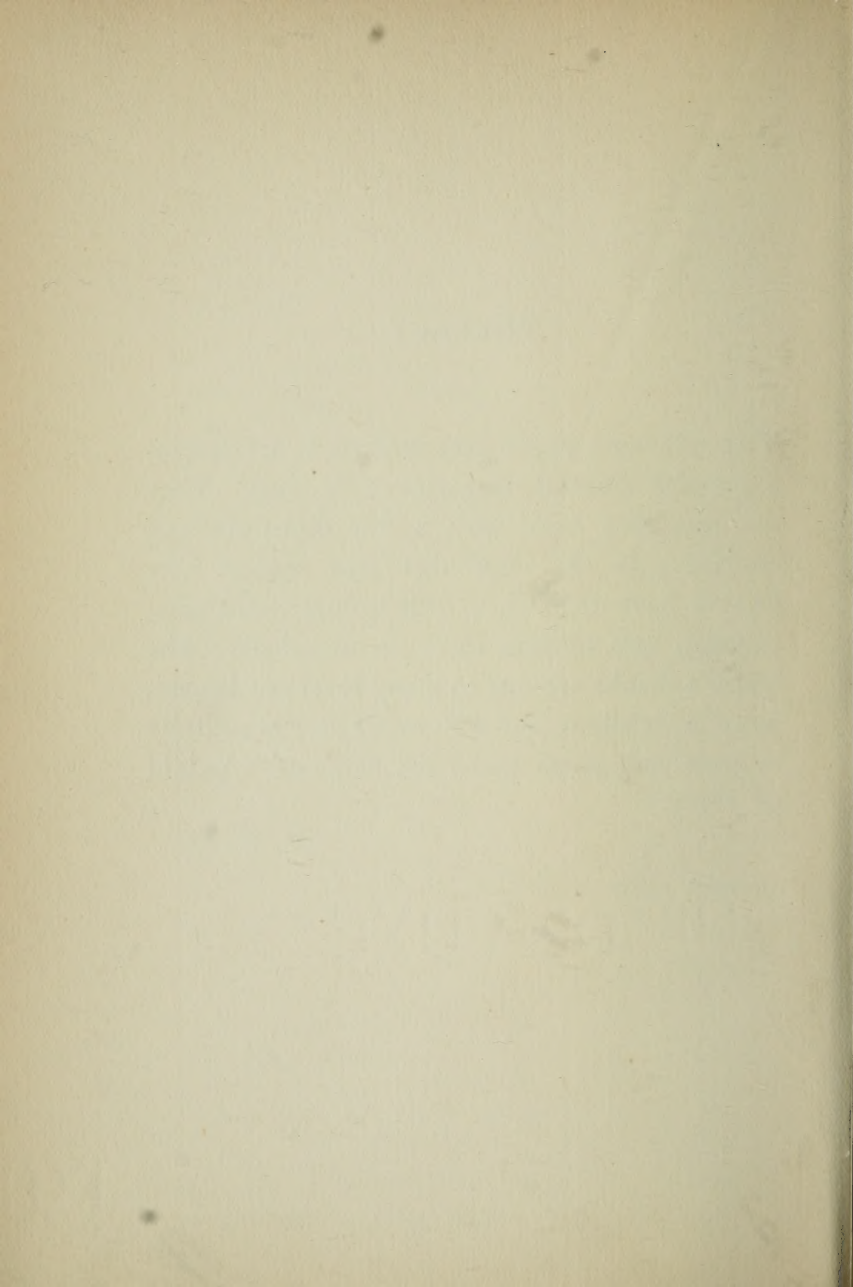
## PREFACE

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THE following pages were written as articles for a popular monthly magazine—*The Sign*. They are reprinted here, with a few omissions and additions, in the hope that *Sign* readers may like to have them in a little volume, and may, perhaps, care to pass them on to others. The writer's thanks are due to many lovers of legend, more especially to one who writes very beautifully in prose and poem under the name of "A child of Mary."

E. E. H.

*August, 1913.*



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*“Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for  
seeing,  
Then beauty is its own excuse for being.”*

EMERSON.



# In Praise of Legend

## CHAPTER I

### LEGEND

A HIGH educational authority on the continent has lately told us that it is the greatest loss to our children that legendary story, including such things as folk-lore, myths, and even fairy tales, should be excluded from our schools. The legendary, he says, is eminently good for the child mind. We agree. It opens out to it the land of the lovely, and refines and educates the imagination to the child's lasting good. He then proceeds to contrast our English exclusion of legend with the essential part which it plays in the school syllabus of every Japanese child—and the contrast is certainly not in our favour.

And not long since, the writer of an article in *The Times*, commenting on Mr. Coulton's

*Mediaeval Garner*, came to pretty much the same conclusion. "If," he says, "the people of the Middle Ages were too ready to believe that anything might happen, we are too apt to believe that nothing wonderful can happen, that life always is and always has been as uneventful as a journey in an omnibus. If they saw the past and future in the light of their own childishness, we are inclined to see it in the darkness of our own dullness. In fact we are as eager to lose romance as they were to find it." "And," he concludes, "there is some danger that our scientific age will fall into that twilight of dullness which Pope prophesied at the end of the *Dunciad*." It is a true charge. In pulling up the tares of mediaeval superstition we have torn away something of mediaeval freshness, and, as Mr. Coulton tells us, we have lost something of the light of early morning and the naïvete of childhood.

Nor is this loss confined to children at school. It applies to grown-up children as well. Castles on the sand! Castles in the air! "Castles in Spain!"—they are all good for us in their place, even if they never get built: and, perhaps, after all, they are just as real as the things which seem more real. Who knows? Anyhow, many who have lost their love for

legend feel not altogether unlike Lowell's *Aladdin* :

“When I was a beggarly boy,  
And lived in a cellar damp,  
I had not a friend nor a toy,  
But I had Aladdin's lamp ;  
When I could not sleep for the cold,  
I had fire enough in my brain,  
And builded, with roofs of gold,  
My beautiful castles in Spain !

Since then I have toiled day and night,  
I have money and power and good store,  
But I'd give all my lamps, of silver bright,  
For the one that is mine no more.  
Take, Fortune, whatever you choose ;  
You gave, and may snatch again ;  
I have nothing 'twould pain me to lose,  
For I own no more castles in Spain !”

Legends sacred and secular (and it is almost impossible to separate them), Eastern and Western, appeal to the child-side of all but the very dull and sordid, and help to keep alive the wonderland-aspect of a workaday life, without which our work would be grind, and routine drudgery. Maybe, we are none of us the worse for “pretending” sometimes, and for playing at belief in gnomes and pixies and elves, and such make-believe as Sir J. M. Barrie revels in in that fascinating book, *The Little White Bird*—as for instance in “The dear old legend

of the beginning of the fairies." Mothers at least will love to remember "that when the first baby laughed for the first time, his laugh broke up into a million of little pieces which all went romping and skipping about; and that was the beginning of the fairies!" And will not brides and bridegrooms see love and laughter in the legend which makes the fairies wear their wedding rings round their fairy waists? Some of us too will see a deeper meaning in the story of the magic stick which drew the shepherd straight to the lost lamb which had wandered from the fold. The fairy-laughter! the bride's wedding ring! the magic stick! How silly it all is! Is it?

Legend, it has been said, is like the creeper clinging round the trunk of truth—and we want the creeper to beautify the trunk. To do away with all imagination, all romance, all legend, all fairy follies, is to deprive our children and ourselves of one great item in a good education. We all remember how Charles Dickens, in *Hard Times*, sketches for us the result, the inevitable result, of an education confined within the barriers of hard facts. "Facts, I want nothing but facts," says Mr. Gradgrind—and the melancholy effect on his own two children is seen in the ever-living and



ever-warning examples of Tom and Louisa. We refuse, then, to let go legend ; we deny any one's right to starve a healthy imagination. If a desecrated imagination may and does lead souls to Satan, a consecrated imagination may and does lead souls to God.

## CHAPTER II

*THE LOVE OF LEGEND*

TRUE, Sacred Legend, which is to be our principal thought, is something far higher and deeper than mere fairy tale ; but, after all, it belongs to the same family, and is only, perhaps, a more serious member of the one family circle. For the love of legend, Christian or pagan, solemn or trivial, is to some what the love of fairy tale is to others ; and as long as each is pure and beautiful, each has its place in the one great story whose motto is written in the good old Book of Truth : "Whatsoever things are lovely . . . think on these things."

For instance, there is an old legend which relates that when, at the Purification, S. Mary offered a lamb in will but a dove in deed, an angel touched the dove and turned it into a lamb. It is, of course, a pure invention : there is not a single word of truth in the story ; not a shred of

**Legend of the  
Purification.**

evidence for its veracity. It is wholly outside the realm of fact. Yet there it is, legend, lovely legend. It is not exactly fable, nor is it quite the same as parable. It is not a fairy tale, nor is it myth, romance, or tradition. It is none of them ; it is all of them. It is legend—legend which nearly always springs from, or merges into, one or the other, and yet which, as Goëthe says of Venice, can really only be compared with itself. And as such we love it.

For legend appeals to something within us—something which we want and have a right to ; something which comes under the law of supply and demand ; something that appeals to the sense of the lovely which exists in nearly everybody. For there is something in most of us which can never really be satisfied with *£ s. d.*, which needs something more than iron safes and well-bound ledgers, which is unsatisfied with cold grey of abstract doctrine or dogma, however essential such doctrine and storm-proof dogma may be. The value of a hair-locket is not always to be appraised by its worth to a pawnbroker.

What is this something ? It is the love of the lovely. And legend, and all that is lovely in legend, contributes its quota to satisfying the demand.

And notice! This love of legend is both racial and individual.

It is racial. Every nation has its legends mixed up with, and branching off into, traditions, fairy tales, fables, myths, romances—our own nation amongst them. As there are the Roman *fabulae* or fables, and Greek myths, and Arabian Nights, so there are the old *sagas*, saws, or sayings, which play so large a part in our legendary past, and have their root in a GOD-given love of legend. No literature would be complete without its legends, for any literature which omits an element in an appeal to the imaginative faculties ceases to provide for a real want in its best students.

And it is individual. Some folk, of course, are as devoid of the sense of the lovely as Wordsworth and Milton were of the sense of humour. So much the worse for them. The child, small or grown, who cannot love the bird-song of Burns' "white whistling thrush," lacks something which another child possesses and gains by possessing. Did not Ruskin both gain and give by seeing the lovely in Tintoret's huge pictures to which others were blind? William Blake puts the thought very prettily :



“Sweet babe, in thy face  
Soft desires I can trace,  
Secret joys and secret smiles,  
Little pretty infant wiles.”

Given the love of the lovely, legend, with a hundred and one other things, helps to meet and to satisfy its legitimate demands.

## CHAPTER III

*THE DANGER OF LEGEND*

THERE is, of course, a danger, a very real danger to certain temperaments, in this appeal to the imagination, in this love of legend—as there is in the love of “all things bright and beautiful.” Thus legend may take, and at times has taken, the place of truth—as in *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, when one of his allegorical characters, Sloth, owns that he does not know his *Paternoster*, but does know his “rimes of Robin Hood.” Or again, legend may be, and at times has been, taught for truth, as in the case of the material version of the *Legend of Loretto*. The danger exists. In some temperaments “the imagination is so active and subtle and needs so little basis of fact that it runs riot in the obscure and the wonderful.” S. Paul, speaking of a kindred subject, twice warns his readers against a like danger, forbidding them to give heed to fables—that is, speculations and mythical stories (such as

abound in the Talmud and the Koran) which with the Jews have so often superseded belief in their ancient Scriptures. The Bible realizes and emphasizes the danger, but the very same Bible makes use of the very same methods in its teaching. Both the Old and the New Testaments appeal to the imagination again and again, as, for example, in the story of the talking trees in Judges, or the coloured horses in Zechariah, and in parables so numerous that it is written of the Master, in magnificent hyperbole, "without a parable spake He not unto them"—and that in spite of the danger of being misunderstood, as indeed He was in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, where "this flame" has so often been misinterpreted as referring to a material fire for the punishment of spiritual beings.

It may be that legend has at times poached upon the preserves of truth, but a religion which runs no risks and incurs no dangers is not the religion of either the Church or the Bible.

The danger is real, but not prohibitive, nor, as we have seen, is it limited to legend. The very same danger exists in regard to the truth itself. To some characters, in certain stages of their spiritual progress, fresh revelations of truth would be positively harmful, and from such, though only from such, they are withheld. So

it is said of the Jews in Jerusalem, "He (i.e., a God of love) hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." It is God's doing: for seeing too quickly is quite as harmful as seeing too slowly; conversion before the soul is ready for it, healing before the wound is clean—in very love for souls God Himself will stay such mischief, "lest" they be converted before they are prepared, "lest" they be healed before they are cleansed. But the necessary blinding of some need not deprive others of the vision beautiful.

And it is so with legend. To lovers of the lovely it seems almost like pushing an open door to defend the beauty of legend. But many with balanced imaginations have shut their eyes to the lovely, simply because others with unbalanced imaginations have misused the gift. They see a lasso in every legend, a "burglar under the bed" in every form of imagery, sacred or secular, and often, quite unnecessarily, go in great fear where no fear is. Much, of course, must depend upon temperament. Some temperaments always think in red and talk in scarlet, and these may well leave the love of legend alone. But because "one man's meat is another man's



poison," there is no need for everybody to become a vegetarian. Lovers of legend have no quarrel with those who are colour-blind to its beauty, or legitimately afraid of its dangers, but they do quarrel with those who make their own myopia the limit of their neighbour's vision, or are always trying to correct other peoples' observations by their own quadrants.

For to many there is an inner vision in legend, as there is in nature ; and just as Blake, the poet-artist, "sees heaven in a wildflower," so they see the heavenly in legend. Indeed, legends are the wildflowers of theology, the evergreens of history—grown, it may be, in the mystic garden of the "never-never-land," but none the less beautiful, and perhaps none the less real, for that. Legends are decorations rather than dogma, but dogmas would be dull indeed without the decorations. Thus, in their own sphere and on their own ground (or shall we say "playground?") legends have their proper province in Church teaching. What, then, we ask, is this province?

## CHAPTER IV

*THE PROVINCE OF LEGEND*

It is the province of legend to teach through the imagination, to appeal, not to the intellectual, but to the imaginative faculties. It is not the province of legend to establish any doctrine or to prove any article of the Catholic Faith. Legend has nothing to do with evidences, and no single clause in any one of the creeds is affected by its truth or untruth. Indeed, it is the essence of legend that its teaching is wholly irrespective of its credibility. While parable conveys its teaching through story based on truth, and fable teaches through story which is manifestly untrue, legend teaches through story which may be either true or untrue, or which, though untrue, is based on truth. Thus, for example, the legends of S. Veronica, or of the *Stigmata* of S. Francis, or the sacred monogram on the breast of S. Ignatius, or the legends of S. Dismas or of Shemuel may be true or untrue.

Their teaching is independent of their truth. The value of legends, like Dutch pictures, depends upon that which they represent rather than upon their veracity.

Thus when, some time ago, the Home Secretary laid the foundation-stone of a training college at Caerleon, and based his speech upon the fitness of the legendary surroundings—the site of the college overlooking King Arthur's Table—he was not asking anybody to accept the historical accuracy of the Arthurian legend. He was using, and rightly using, legend as an appeal to the imagination, wholly irrespective of its evidential value. And in this sense, if in no other, legend justifies its existence.

Legend, then, without any necessary historical worth has its own value in history—sacred and secular. And this in two special ways—in its attractiveness, and its results.

I. THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF LEGEND. The attractiveness of legend has in dark, dull ages played its part in keeping alive the more solid but less attractive side of both secular and religious history.

In secular history, for instance, the legend of Alfred and the cakes (pure fiction, alas!) has probably preserved an interest in that period for many a child who has unconsciously woven

historical facts round the unhistorical legend. Or there is the legend of Cnut, or Canute, and the waves, which combines the sacred and the secular. It is, Prof. Freeman tells us, nothing but a legend ; but the teaching is as useful as if it were all true. The teaching is enshrined in the legendary words of the king, as the waves dashed over his feet—"Let all dwellers on earth know that the power of the king is vain and worthless, nor is there any worthy of the name of King but He Whose will heaven and earth and sea obey by eternal laws." It is the natural outcome of the legend that, as the story adds, the king should never again wear his crown, but should place it on an image of our LORD on the Cross.

So in sacred history many a hard fact of Church or Scripture history has been preserved, and remembered, owing to the legends which have grown up round about it.

The attractiveness of sacred legend has not infrequently drawn to the Faith those to whom the dry bones of theology have primarily proved of little or no attraction. There are cases in which a book like Mrs. Jameson's *Legends of the Madonna* has appealed to the artist temperament as no book on dogma could at the time have done. Such a book has led souls through the picture of the lovely in the Mother, to see

the "altogether lovely" in the SON—and, after all, this is the highest province of legend, to lead souls to CHRIST.

2. THE RESULTS OF LEGEND. There is a very practical outcome of legend in its results upon architecture and art in general. As the value, even the market value, of many a place has been more than doubled by its association with a novel by Sir Walter Scott or Charles Dickens, so it is with legend and with many a spot connected with its story.

Thus, there is a legend which tells how the relics of the Magi found their way to Cologne, and how in order to do them honour  
**Cologne Cathedral.** a glorious cathedral was built over the shrine in which they were preserved. Cologne Cathedral is no mean result of legend ; nor, indeed, is the mere shrine of silver-gilt, enriched with priceless gems, in which the reputed relics are exhibited.

Another church, magnificent in itself, though less wonderful than Cologne Cathedral, owes its origin to legend—S. Mary Maggiore  
**S. Mary Maggiore.** at Rome. It was, it is said, built by a wealthy Roman after a reputed vision of the Blessed Virgin, as "our Lady of the Snow," in a dream in which she commanded him to build a church in her honour on a spot

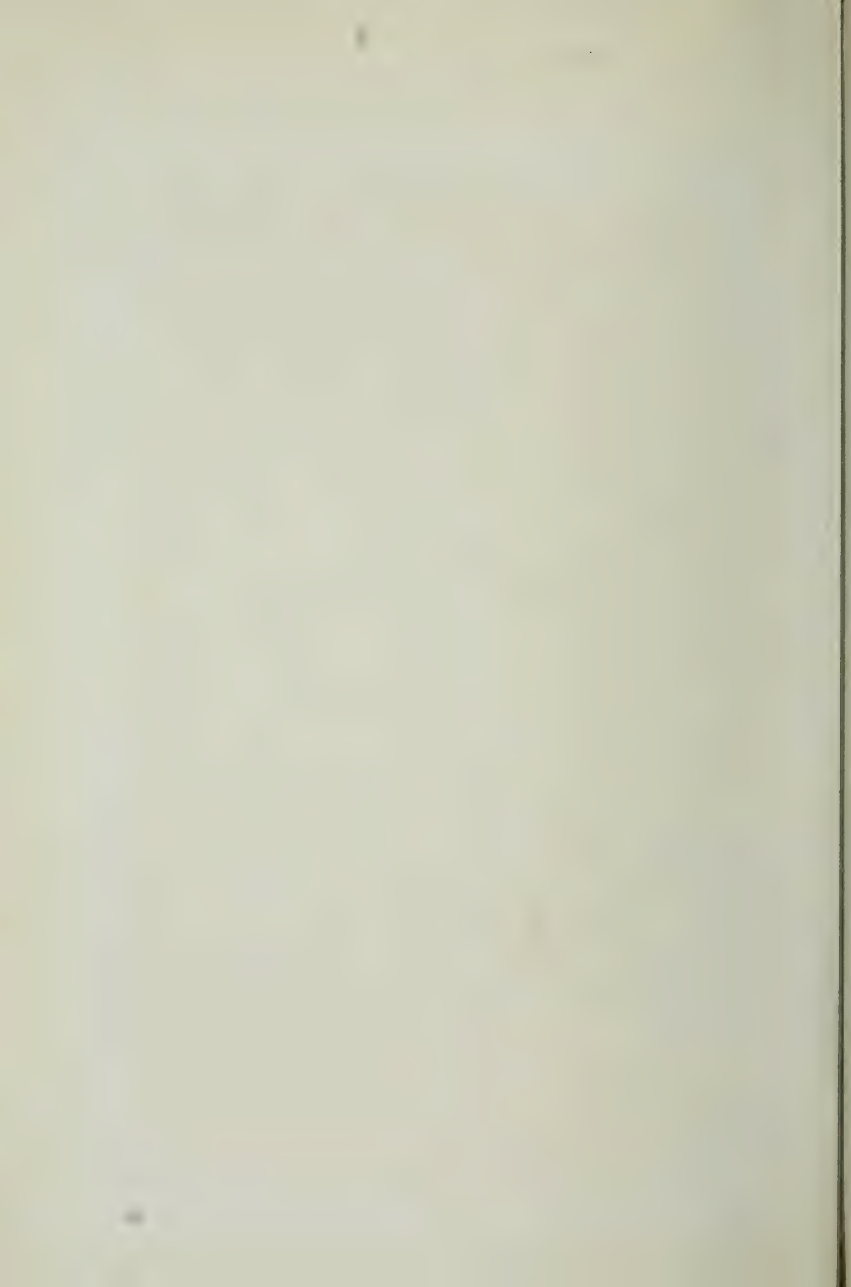


which would be indicated by a fall of snow on a hot day. The day came, the snow fell, and the church was built.

Yet another church may be mentioned as owing its foundation to legend—that of SS. Giovanni and Paulo, Venice, the foundations of which were laid by the Dominicans about 1234, in consequence of a miraculous vision appearing to the doge. Ruskin relates the legend very happily in his *Stones of Venice*: “In the year 1226 the Doge Giacomina Tiepolo dreamed a dream; and in his dream he saw the little oratory of the Dominicans, and, behold, all the ground around it (now occupied by the church) was covered with roses of the colour of vermilion, and the air was filled with their fragrance. And, in the midst of the roses, there were seen flying to and fro a crowd of white doves, with golden crosses upon their heads. And while the doge looked, and wondered, behold, the angels descended from heaven with golden censers, and passing through the oratory, and forth among the flowers, they filled the place with the smoke of their incense. Then the doge heard suddenly a clear and loud voice which proclaimed, ‘This is the place that I have chosen for My preachers!’ and, having heard it, straightway he awoke, and went to the



*"The angels descended from heaven with golden censers."*



Senate, and declared to them the vision. Then the Senate decided that forty paces of ground should be given to enlarge the monastery ; and the Doge Tiepolo himself made a still larger grant afterwards.”<sup>1</sup>

Or, we may come nearer home and picture to ourselves the origin of S. Bartholomew the Great, Smithfield : “ I am Bartholomew, the Apostle of JESUS CHRIST,

**S. Bartholomew  
the Great.**

that come to succour thee in thine anguish, and to open to thee the sacred mysteries of heaven ; know me truly, by the will and commandment of the High Trinity, and the coming favour of the celestial court and counsel, to have chosen a place in the suburbs of London at Smithfield, where, in my name, thou shalt found a church, and it shall be the house of GOD ; there shall be the tabernacle of the Lamb, the temple of the HOLY GHOST.”

These were the words, according to a legend handed down to us from the twelfth century, that the Apostle Bartholomew uttered to Rahere, Canon of S. Paul's, when sick of malarial fever, caught on a visit to the site of the martyrdom of S. Paul outside the walls of Rome, in the year 1120. Three years later he founded the church and priory of S. Bartholomew—a large

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, iii.

collection of monastic buildings, with its chapter-house, cloisters, dormitory, and refectory, and its mulberry gardens and close.

But perhaps the most striking illustration of the thought is to be found in *The Legend of Einsiedeln*. Visitors to Zurich will remember the little village of Einsiedeln, one of the beauties of the lake. It practically consists of a convent—the Convent of Our Lady of Hermits—and a large Benedictine abbey, with its wondrous church. The convent, the abbey, and the church are all the result of an ancient legend which no Switzer in the valley is ever slow to tell.

Back the legend goes to the ninth century, when a certain Meinrad, son of Berthold, a prince of Hohenzollern, renounced his wealth, and became a Benedictine monk. Finding, insufficient solitude in the monastery, he determined to become a hermit, and retired to a hut in the lonely Swiss mountains. Here he remained for seven years, until harassed by crowds which followed him into the wilds, attracted by his sanctity and wisdom, Meinrad now withdrew into the recesses of a wood known as the Dark Forest, where not even the hardest would penetrate. Here he built another hut, and lived, in prayer and meditation, for twenty-six years.



At length, two robbers, believing him to be possessed of great wealth, discovered his abode, put him to death, and, finding nothing about him but a hair shirt, fled from the Dark Forest in terror and disgust. They were followed, however, says the legend, by two tame crows, well-known bird-friends of S. Meinrad, who shrieked at them and attacked them all the way to an inn at Zurich. There the innkeeper heard them, and recognizing S. Meinrad's crows suspected something wrong, and hastened to the hut, where he found the dead body of the saint. The robbers were pursued, caught, and suffered for their crime, and to this day the inn bears the title of "The Two Faithful Crows."<sup>1</sup> Round Meinrad's hut grew other huts, then a chapel, and then an abbey, erected by Eberhard, which became the centre of learning, civilization, and sanctity, and now possesses a library with nearly 50,000 vols. and priceless MSS. Thus did legend play its part in the development of the better life.

Nor must we forget what the Painter owes to legend. What a wealth of beauty it has bequeathed to him, and through him to us. We need only think of such pictures as the legend of "S. Mark and the Fisherman," from

<sup>1</sup> The two birds are, it will be remembered, introduced into the arms of the abbey.

the Scuola di S. Marco, by Giorgione ; or "The Dream of S. Ursula," by Vittore Carpaccio ; or the three great pictures by Gentile Bellini depicting the "Miracles of the Holy Cross" ; or the endless paintings in every picture-gallery in Europe to remind ourselves of the artists' debt to legend.

So again we find legends giving names to places and churches, and keeping alive much that is lovely about them. Most of us, for example, have seen the beautiful "Christ Church" to which the little village on the Avon owes its name. The story runs that it was intended to dedicate the church to the Name of the Holy Trinity, but that just before the day of dedication the builders discovered that a piece of timber had been cut a foot too short. What was to be done ? The villagers were in despair, until early on the morning of the day a mysterious Figure appeared Whose hand stretched the timber to its proper length and placed it in its proper position. In the mysterious Figure they had recognized the Carpenter of Nazareth, the great CHRIST Himself, and to Him accordingly they dedicated the church.

Poet and sculptor and many a beauteous writer tell the same tale.

Surely, such glories as Cologne Cathedral, the

Church of S. Mary Maggiore, the Church of SS. Giovanni and Paolo, the Convent, Abbey, and Church of Einsiedeln, and many a treasure in the world's great libraries and galleries which we owe to legend are no small results of legend.

## CHAPTER V

*THE BEAUTY OF LEGEND*

“WHATSOEVER things are lovely, think on these things.” Emerson gives us the best commentary on the words :

“Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing,  
Then beauty is its own excuse for being.”

Think of the story of Veronica. A woman named Veronica, or Berenice, follows the procession along the *Via Dolorosa*. S. Veronica. Suddenly, with true womanly impulse, she takes the Eastern veil from her head, and with it wipes the face of the wounded *Christus* : the portrait of the face remains as a permanent impression on the veil. So runs the legend, and there is nothing hostile to credibility in the story—though the more modern claim that the imprinted portion of the veil is preserved in S. Peter’s at Rome obviously rests on a different basis. The story itself may be true or untrue.

It is more probable than improbable, perhaps. It is easier to believe than to doubt that one pitying hand, a woman's hand, should be stretched forth in sympathy as He passed along His way and should press her Eastern veil over the face marred more than any man's, and that the veil should retain the impress of that sacred face. It is the beauty of the legend and the teaching it conveys which matters. True or untrue, who would wish to forget the daring tenderness of a woman's love?

“With a woman's holy daring,  
Desolate but not despairing,  
One there is who wipes His face.

May our hearts like hers be tender,  
That we may His likeness render,  
Seek we His conforming grace.”

After reading some such legend we may well believe that the beauty of legend, like the beauty of a flower, is a sufficient reason for its own existence. For the ugly is never more dangerous than when it appeals to the imagination, never more perilous than when darkness is come into its world, and men love darkness rather than light. Just as no two solids can occupy the same space at the same time, so beauty and ugliness mutually exclude one another in the same imagination. The ugly hates the



beautiful, and flees from it. Beauty is like "The Tower without poison" (*La Tour Sans Venin*, one of the seven wonders of Dauphiny), of which it is said that poisonous creatures die as soon as they approach it. In this sense the beautiful is its own excuse for being.

Or, there is the simple beauty of the legend of the *Vervain*, or Verbena.

**The Vervain.** This *Herba Sacra*, or divine weed, was said by the Romans to cure bites from animals, arrest venom, and act as an antidote to many a poison. Feasts—called *verbenalia*—were held annually in its honour. Then legend catches up the thought, and tells how the herb was found on Calvary, and staunched the bleeding wound of its Creator on the Cross :

"Hallowed be thou, Vervain,  
As thou growest on the ground,  
For in the Mount of Calvary  
There thou wast first found.

Thou healest CHRIST our Saviour,  
And staunchest His bleeding wound,  
In the Name of FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST  
I take thee from the ground."

Whether or no it had the virtue here assigned to it matters nothing to the legend. The inner thought is as beautiful as the outward herb.

Again, true or imaginary, who would wish to

destroy the old legend of the "Saint Calvary" so livingly related by Shorthouse in *S. Calvary. Blanche, Lady Falaise*. "As we crossed the bridge," he writes, "the dim traceries upon the rock assumed distincter shape. To the right hand, between the rock and the lower fall was a sort of field, strewn with juniper trees, and with low mounds of earth and little crosses.

"I pointed to this strangely strewn field. 'What is this?' I said.

"'These are the graves, madam, of unfortunates who have perished in the chamois hunting, in the snows, and'—he (the guide) lowered his voice and raised his cap as he went on—'such is the grace of the Saint Calvary that no grave has ever been torn up, and no corpse mangled by the wolves in this holy ground.'

"And when, a minute after, we stood beneath the rock and gazed up upon this 'Saint Calvary' we could well fancy that some such legend might be true." True or not, it contains a truth, and that it is which matters.

Or, recall the legend of *S. Dismas*, the name given to the penitent thief in a second-century tradition. It is very beautiful, especially for mothers. Two mothers and two children fill the picture—*S. Mary with the Holy Child*, and a woman

**The Legend of  
S. Dismas.**

whose little one was born a leper, white as snow. The Holy Family is on its way to Egypt. The message has come, and Mary, true to her *fiat* (no isolated act, but involving repeated acts of surrender), has obeyed the call :

“No word she spoke,  
But took her sleeping Treasure in her arms,  
And went with Him out into the starlight cold,  
To face the desert with its nameless fears.”

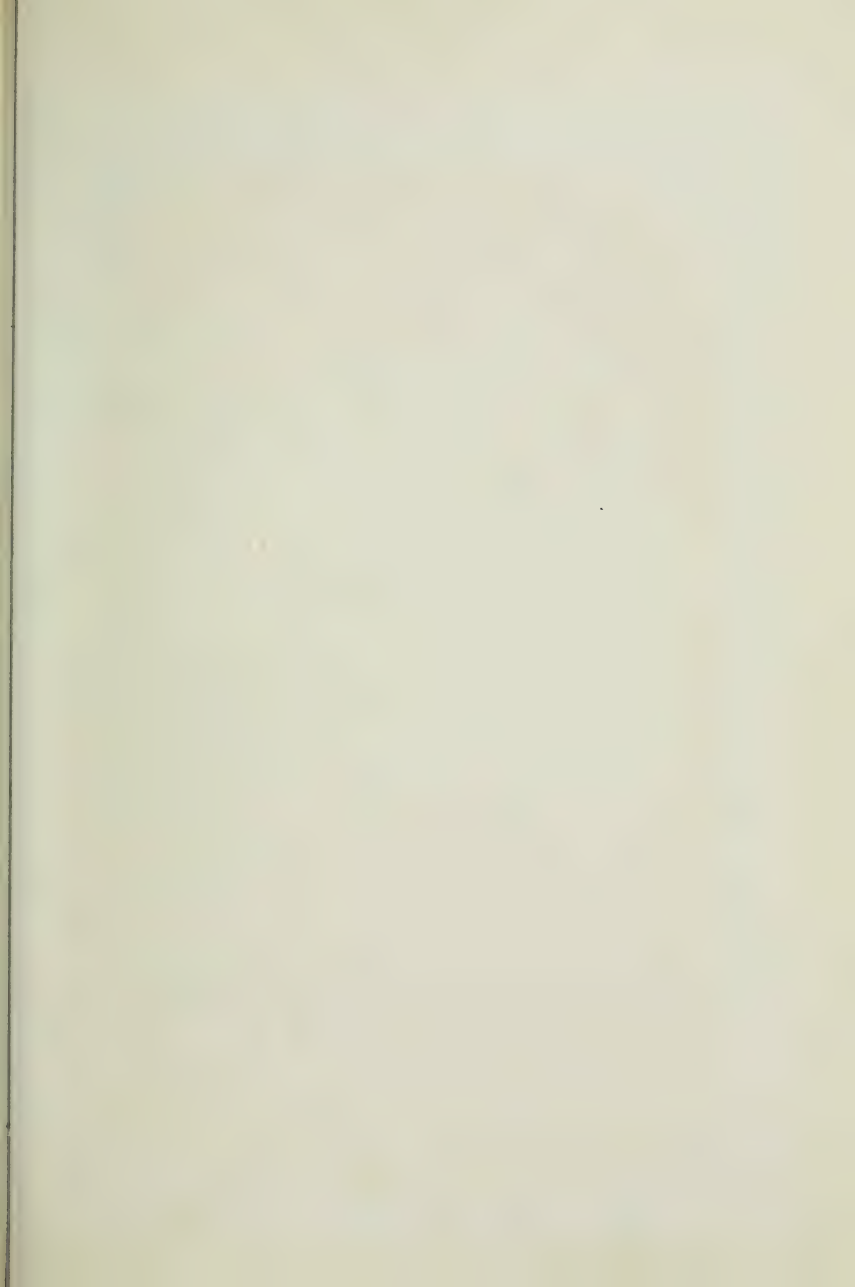
And then, as legend tells :

“One night they sheltered in a robber’s cave,  
And found within the rugged outlaw’s home  
A kindly welcome from the outlaw’s wife,  
Who set before them all her homely fare.  
And while she served them wond’ringly she gazed  
Upon the peerless beauty of the Child.”

For she too had a little one—loved all the more, as is the way with motherhood, because of its affliction.

“But, ah ! not fair like Him ! A mother’s eye  
Alone could bear the sight of this poor face ;  
A mother’s heart alone had room for love  
For such as he. While other mothers showed  
Their treasured darlings, proud of each small grace  
Of baby beauty, she, alas ! must hide  
The treasure of her heart from sightfall,  
The very sun of heaven might not shine  
Upon a leper’s brow, and such he was,  
Her little Dismas, whom she loved the more  
That he was so afflicted.”

And the two women stand facing each other—





*"Mary the Mother of Jesus, and the mother of the leper child."*



Mary the Mother of Jesus, and the mother of the leper child :

“And lo ! the mother of the leper child  
Looked at the Mother of the Child most fair.  
She spoke no word, but slowly crossed the room  
To that dark corner where, safe out of sight,  
The little leper all unconscious lay,  
And brought the sleeping child to Mary’s side,  
Showing her sadly its disfigurement.”

And Mary shrinks not from the child, but bids the mother cleanse it in the healing waters in which the Holy Child has just been bathed :

“In that sweet water which but now hath bathed  
The limbs of her fair Child.  
And lo ! he came forth fair, with flesh renewed,  
Spotless and beautiful.”

And then the scene changes. Years pass, and once again the two children meet together on Calvary :

“Amid the mystic gloom on Calvary’s hill  
The two babes, grown to manhood, met once more.  
Ah ! Dismas, thy first leprosy was fair  
To that which now disfigures thy poor soul.”

And we all know how the story ends :

“Look round, poor Dismas, meet those wistful eyes  
Expressing His heart’s wish that thou wouldst ask  
The pardon He is longing to bestow !  
And Dismas looked.  
And Dismas heard, and saw, and he believed.  
His poor dead mother’s simple trusting faith,  
Which three-and-thirty years ago had won  
Him health within the cave, now woke in him.”

No need to point the lesson here !

“Ah ! happy sinner ! Thus  
Was well repaid the hospitality  
Thy mother showed to His so long ago,  
An everlasting welcome into heav’n  
For that one night’s rude welcome in the cave.”

It is no more true than the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In each case it is the beauty of the story which is “its own excuse for being.”

Or there is the legend of mother love, told not long ago in the *Treasury*. At the dawn of creation an angel visited this earth, **Mother Love.** and before returning looked about for something to take back to heaven. Three things attracted his attention—a bouquet of flowers, the smile of an infant, and a mother’s love. But when he reached the gate of Paradise, the flowers had withered, the smile had vanished, and only the mother’s love remained. And all the angels in Paradise exclaimed : “There is nothing on earth pure enough for heaven except a mother’s love.”

Who cares about the truth of the story ? It is legend, lovely legend, enshrining a truth though itself untrue.

Or, think once more of the legend of the lamb already referred to.<sup>1</sup> Its beauty justifies its

<sup>1</sup> p. 6.

existence. No one is asked to believe that an angel really touched a turtle dove and turned it into a lamb. Who cares? What does it matter? Its teaching—the acceptance of the offering, and the transfiguration of the gift in accordance with the motive of the offerer—is all that matters. And that is the point of the legend. Outside its own province it would be nonsense; within its province it adds to the sum total of the lovely.

**The Legend  
of the Lamb.**

And this is just what we want; for we are even yet suffering from that depreciation of the beautiful which was the crime of the nineteenth century—that century which, by an over pre-occupation with the material, almost entirely banished the beautiful. Mr. Houstin Chamberlain, indeed, the author of that suggestive work *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, expresses the opinion that even at this present moment there exists, perhaps, no savage or half-civilized race which does not possess more love of beauty than the great mass of so-called civilized Europeans. This is, no doubt, a picture painted with too much red on the brush, but it, at least, suggests that we cannot spare any single item which makes for the beautiful in twentieth-century life.

Truth and legend, then, each have their own

task, and as long as we do not ask from one what belongs to the other, each has its work to do. May we put it like this? "Pillars and Lily-work." Legend is the lily-work on the pillars of the Temple—work of which it is written: "On the top of the pillars was lily-work, and so was the work of the pillars finished."<sup>1</sup> "*And so!*" Pillars and lily-work both were needed—the pillars for strength, the lily-work for beauty. The pillars were, indeed, the groundwork, the essentials; but the pillars were not finished until they were crowned with "the lily-work on the top." Both "strength and beauty are in His sanctuary." When the beauty was added to the strength, then, and not till then, is it written, "*and so* the pillars were finished." All pillars and no lily-work, all stability and no beauty, would lack finish: all lily-work and no pillars, all beauty and no stability, would lack foundation. Both are necessary for the completion of the Temple, decorations as well as foundations, lily-work as well as stonework, beauty as well as "the beams and boards of cedar."

Take the Christmas Crib as an illustration. The Bible story is all that is essential. "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings vii. 22.

Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger." Nothing more is vital. There is the central truth of the Christian Faith, the Incarnation. It is the pillar and ground of truth. But then comes in the lily-work "upon the top of the pillars"—the colouring with which legend paints the scene. And the world would be a duller world without the colouring, untrue to fact as it is. As Ruskin reminds us, almost every painter's presentment of the scene is hopelessly untrue. The gorgeous scenery, the Virgin's "glorious apparel," the royal insignia; the angels hovering over the cradle—such things have no existence in the cold, bare stable. But we would not be without them in spite of their purely legendary character. They appeal to something in us, the love of the lovely; and, to the consecrated imagination, they have been a help rather than a hindrance, a reality rather than the reverse.

Thus does legend sign its own name, as it were, to Shelley's great "Hymn to Beauty," and say to the imagination as to the intellect :

"Spirit of beauty, thou dost consecrate  
With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon  
Of human thought and form."



## CHAPTER VI

*THE GROWTH OF LEGEND*

How did legend grow? Roughly speaking, it is a story in three chapters.

CHAPTER I reminds us of the origin and the meaning of legend. The word itself comes from the Latin *legere* to read, and the *legenda* were originally simply things to be read. These were primarily readings from Scripture.

CHAPTER II tells of the expansion of the word, when readings from the lives of the Saints were added to reading of the Scriptures. These readings were gathered from a thirteenth-century work called the *Aurea Legenda*, or *Golden Legends*, because the people considered it worth its weight in gold. It was written by James de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, in the thirteenth century, and contained 177 chapters, each treating the life of a saint—a work popularized in our day by Longfellow's poem of the same name.

CHAPTER III expands the use of the word

still further in a work called *Acta Sanctorum*, commenced in the seventeenth century, and shows how the love of the marvellous often crept into the love of the beautiful, and eventually gave the word its modern meaning, just as "romance" originally meant something written in the "Romance" language but now suggests some wild-flown adventures.

And, after all, our popular use of the word is not so very far removed from the philosophic. In philosophy a legend is defined as an imaginary idea evolved out of a fact, and this is very much what the modern legend has come to be.

Thus we find that legend is evolved from three main sources, Scripture, Tradition, and History, adding its own romance to the facts recorded in sometimes one, sometimes the other, and sometimes all three. Think of it first as evolved from and adding to Scripture.

There is, for instance, the Bible story of the Annunciation: "And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail! thou that art highly favoured, the LORD is with thee: blessed art thou among women." There is the fact. And legend, mixed with tradition, adds that it happened at the hour of sunset (the hour "bathed in the crimson glow of eventide," the hour called the

The  
Annunciation.

*Ave Maria*, when the Angelus is rung), and that Mary was in the cottage of the Annunciation, sewing, or meditating, or saying her prayers, or was at the village well drawing water for household use. Here is legend added to fact.

Again, there is the story of the CHRIST-Child lying in the manger. There is the fact. Legend adds its romance, showing us the Holy Child slumbering in His cradle, rocked by two angels, while Mary sits by engaged in needlework.

And there is the Epiphany legend of the swaddling clothes. First, there is the fact.

**The Swaddling Clothes.** "She brought forth her firstborn Son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes": and legend adds that when the Magi had offered their gifts, S. Mary gave to each of them a piece of the clothing in which she had wrapped her dear One.

And as with the swaddling clothes, so with the seamless coat. Scripture relates the fact:

**The Seamless Coat.** "Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.

They said, therefore, among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it whose it shall be." Whose it became we know not; the name of its passing possessor is not told us. It is said that eventually it came into the possession of Pontius Pilate, and

legend adds that he wore it on two occasions when he was in danger, and on each occasion was preserved from his enemies, while on a third occasion, when he was without it, his enemies prevailed.

Next there is Tradition. There are, for example, the legends of the Epiphany and the Resurrection. Scripture tells the story

**The Three  
Kings.**

of the wise men from the East : tradition carries on the story, making them kings, and three in number. Legend adds to tradition by naming them Gaspar, Melchior, and Belthasar, describing them as old, middle-aged, and young, and as being descended from Shem, Ham, and Japhet. Here tradition adds to Scripture, and legend to tradition.

Or, there is the Scriptural story of the Resurrection. Tradition adds that when Jesus

**The  
Resurrection.**

was risen from the dead, He appeared to the Blessed Mother—a tradition so natural that it is easier to believe than to disbelieve. Legend adds that as S. Mary waited with mother-instinct in rapt expectation for His appearance, choirs of attendant angels came into the home where she was living (S. John's "own home") and sang the *Regina Cæli*, filling the house with

their Alleluias. Here, again, we see legend at work adding to tradition.

Or, there is the story of the relics of S. Mark at Venice. Tradition asserts that the relics of the saint were taken to Venice in the ninth century, a tradition which

**S. Mark's, Venice.** practically amounts to history: "That the Venetians possessed themselves of his body in the ninth century," writes Ruskin, "there appears no sufficient reason to doubt, nor that it was principally in consequence of their having done so that they chose him for their patron saint." So far tradition! Legend adds that when the body was being translated to Venice, a fearful storm arose, and that S. Mark appeared to the captain of the vessel, warned him of the danger, and directed him how to act, thus saving the vessel, its crew, and the sacred relic. Here, once more, is an illustration of our thought.

Then there is History. History and legend, both sacred and secular, are mixed inextricably together. Think of the lovely legends **Joan of Arc.** which surround the girlish figure of "The Flower of France," Joan of Arc. History relates, only too truly, the fact (one of the darkest facts on record) of the burning of the maid; and legend wanders away into the



lovely, and adds that the swirling smoke which hid the victim fashioned itself into the shape of our Saviour's name, and that the bystanders saw a pure white dove—symbol of the maiden's soul—rising out of the cruel flames, and winging its way to heaven.<sup>1</sup> Here is legend adding to history.

Or, take another illustration—the founding of Westminster Abbey by Sebert, King of the Saxons. History tells how Sebert, **Westminster Abbey.** having embraced Christianity, and being baptized by Mellitus Bishop of London, built a magnificent church for the east of London, which he dedicated to S. Paul (our S. Paul's Cathedral), as the "Minster" of the east, and then proceeded to build a minster for the west (our Westminster Abbey), which he dedicated to S. Peter—both S. Paul's in the east and S. Peter's in the west thus commemorating his conversion. And legend adds that on the eve of the day fixed by Mellitus for the dedication of the Abbey S. Peter appeared to a fisherman named Edric, as he was casting his nets into the Thames, and begged to be taken over to the Isle of Thorney, where the Abbey now stands. As they entered the newly-built church the fisher-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Flower of France*, by Justin McCarthy.

man saw a light from heaven which turned the darkness of the night into day, and lighted up every corner of the Abbey. And when, on the following day, the service began, the light still shone above the brightness of the sun, and Edric saw the choir full of light-giving angels, and heard them singing the divine liturgy, while all about the sanctuary were angels ascending and descending, as in Jacob's dream-vision. It is a lovely legend added to history.

Sometimes, too, we find history evolved from and adding to legend. The story of Kirkstall **Kirkstall Abbey.** Abbey will illustrate the point. It began in legend and merged into history. In the reign of Henry I—so the legend runs—the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared in a vision to a poor shepherd named Seleth, who lived in the South of England. "Arise, Seleth," she said, "and go into the province of York and seek diligently in the Valley of Airedale for a place called Kirkstall; for there shalt thou prepare a future home for brethren serving my Son." And Seleth trembled and was troubled. But the voice continued: "Fear not, Seleth, I am Mary, the mother of JESUS of Nazareth, the Saviour of the world." Then he arose and betook himself to travel in search

of Kirkstall. Having escaped great dangers he arrived at his destination, fixed his cell there, was known for his devotions, and the hermitage of Kirkstall became famous throughout the country. Then legend passes into history, and we find that Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, at the desire of the Abbot of Fountains Abbey, built a religious house on the spot, and the Abbey rose to its place in history.

And if it is asked, What is the use of all these legends, and to whom are they any good?—

**Cui bono.** their teaching, for those who have eyes

to see, is the answer. It is at least something if the legends of the Annunciation remind us that our vocation may come to us when, like Mary, we are about our daily work "in the cottage" or "at the well." It is something to be reminded by the Legend of the Swaddling Clothes that every offering we make to God wins a corresponding gift in return. It is something to be reminded by the Seamless Coat that as long as we are clothed with His righteousness we are safe from our deadliest enemy. It is something to be reminded by the Angels in the Abbey that we are taking part "with angels and archangels" in the service of the sanctuary. It is something to be reminded by the Flower of France that in life's

burning fiery furnace it is the flames themselves which form the Saviour's name, and fit us for our flight to the celestial.

So from Scripture, tradition, and history legend has grown, evolved from and adding to each. And to the balanced imagination it is full of help.

## CHAPTER VII

*THE GARDEN OF LEGEND*

THE garden of legend! "My garden," writes Fielden, "shall grow all the flowers it can. . . . Whatever things are beautiful that make my heart beat, and the eye grow dim, whatever I know to be good that shall I have."

It is a garden in which many lovely flowers are grown. We can only gather a small nosegay, just plucking a few favourite specimens, and pointing to the inward and spiritual truth which they may convey. Here is one :

## I

It was the first Christmas Eve, and "there were shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flock by night"—for then, as in  
**The Legend of Shemuel.** their father David's time, the lion and the bear were ever ready to seize a lamb, and to worry the flock. We know what happened. An angel of the LORD appeared unto them, bade them leave their flock in God's



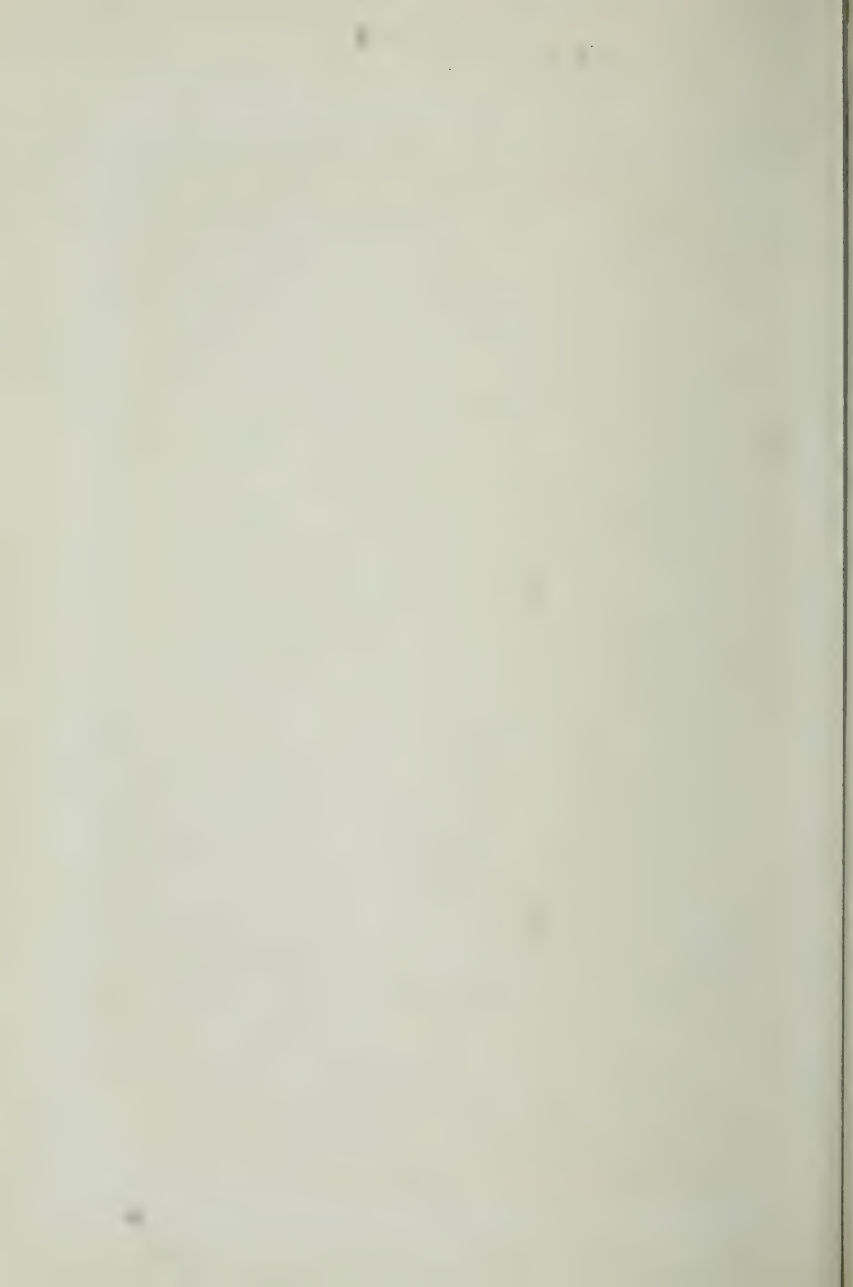
keeping (no small act of faith in the midst of so many and great dangers) and go to Bethlehem, there to see the sight of their lives—the sight which every earnest Jew longed and lived for, even the vision of the Uncreate. “And the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass which the LORD hath made known unto us. And they came with haste and found Mary, and Joseph, and the Babe lying in the manger.”

So runs the Bible record. Legend adds the story of the shepherd who was left behind. For one there was who had that day taken charge of a stranger, sick unto death with a fever great and sore. And whilst others went and saw the vision, Shemuel (for such was his name) remained behind. With many a pang he stayed to nurse the dying man—surely the Stranger of whom it might be said, “I was a Stranger and ye took Me in.” And so it came to pass that Shemuel missed the sight of the CHRIST-Child. And as their way was, the shepherds attributed to him some great crime which made him unfit to go to Bethlehem, a view confirmed on their return when they found that he had caught the fever and died without having seen the Vision Beautiful.

And Shemuel ! Did he really miss the vision ?



*"He stayed to nurse the dying man."*



Does any one ever miss anything by "doing the thing that's nearest"? Listen to the legend:

"Shemuel the Bethlehemite  
Watched a fevered guest at night;  
And his fellows fared afield,  
Saw the angel host revealed;  
He nor caught the mystic story,  
Heard the song, nor saw the glory.

Through the night they gazing stood,  
Heard the holy multitude;  
Back they came in wonder home,  
Knew the Christmas kingdom come,  
Eyes aflame, and hearts elated;  
Shemuel sat alone, and waited.

Works of mercy now, as then,  
Hide the angel host from men;  
Hearts atune to earthly love  
Miss the angel notes above;  
Deeds at which the world rejoices  
Quench the sound of angel voices.

So they thought, nor deemed from whence  
His celestial recompense.  
Shemuel, by the fever bed,  
Touched by beckoning hands that led,  
Died, and saw the Uncreated.  
And his fellows lived and—waited."

True, he missed the lesser vision, the vision "veiled in flesh," the Incarnate GOD in the Christmas cradle; but a greater vision was his, even the unveiled sight of "the FATHER Uncreate, the SON Uncreate, and the HOLY GHOST Uncreate," that lovelier vision kept for those who die. The

vision which he would have given his life to enjoy for a moment was his for evermore.

The legend of Shemuel is being repeated in sober reality by thousands to-day in the rush of the hospital, in the slum house packed with half a dozen families in half as many rooms, in the lonely country cottage, in the often unrecognized difficulties of a nursing home, in lodgings and flats where friend helps friend or stranger succours stranger. What drudgery it sometimes (though only sometimes) seems ! And, if only we weren't so stupid ! if only we could remember the "celestial recompense" in the terrestrial routine, if only we could see the result of choosing, like Shemuel, the prosaic part, what a difference it would make to the colouring of our lives. Shemuel's work leads to Shemuel's reward. It is only the old, old Bible story of gaining life by losing life, told in legend form.

## II

Some of us will remember that sweetest of legends, "Our Lady's Last Christmas," said to be by S. Jerome.

**Our Lady's  
Last Christmas.** It is Christmas Eve, the last the Blessed Mother will ever spend upon this earth, and her thoughts fly back to the old, old days at Bethlehem. She



is sitting with S. John in the apostolic home near Calvary :

“Not alone, for there beside her, with her hand clasped in his own,  
Sits the privileged disciple, Calvary’s begotten son.”

And the past takes possession of her. She longs with a great longing to see again the holy stable, longs for a last communion in the stable-church.

“‘Tis to-day the Eve of Christmas, and the last I have on earth ;  
Let me spend it in that stable, where I gave my CHRIST-Child birth.  
There too you His loved disciple, by your sacerdotal power,  
Once again will bring Him to me, at the holy midnight hour.’  
And the loved disciple answered, ‘Holy Mother, as you will ;  
I will go with you to Bethlehem, and your wishes all fulfil.’”

So to Bethlehem they go, and find there one of the shepherds who had been won by her to the CHRIST-Child on that first Christmas Eve. Drawn by the same desire, he too has made his way to the stable :

“‘Twas the dream of my long lifetime, he had murmured with a sigh,  
Once again to see the stable, on its blessed threshold die.”

And there Mother and shepherd meet once more. Happy shepherd, to wake and find the Mother bending over him, as once she had bent over the Lamb of God. And thus they talk. First the shepherd :—

“Starting up : ‘Oh ! am I dreaming ? ’Tis the same sweet Mother mild ;

Never could this heart forget her, she who held the blessed Child.’

Then, with tears : ‘O Lady Mother, on that night so long ago. I was but a little shepherd, keeping sheep amid the snow. And I gave Him my one treasure, of the flock the fairest lamb ;

And He smiled upon me, Lady, such a smile, as sweet as balm.

And I ne’er forgot it, Lady, as in foreign lands I trod, For its memory, ever vivid, kept me always true to God. Lady, now I’m old and weary, and I wanted just to see Ere I died that spot so hallowed, where my God had smiled on me.”

Then the Mother :—

“Then our Lady sat beside him, and of JESUS gently spoke, Told him of His life and Passion, how His tender heart had broke.

Down the old man’s cheeks so furrowed tenderly the hot tears ran,

As he listened to the story of God’s wondrous love for man.”

And they too, the Mother and the old man, sit and talk of JESUS, kneel and pray to JESUS.

“Like a second sped the night hours, whilst these two knelt side by side,

That old shepherd and God’s Mother, God Himself to both allied.”

And lo ! a wondrous Presence, a wondrous Gift, is theirs—a last Eucharist in the stable where “very early, very early CHRIST was born.”

“Now at midnight, at John’s summons, came the LORD of heaven to earth ;

Came again the Babe of Bethlehem to the cave that gave Him birth.

On that night a first Communion, in that lowly shed was made— . . .

’Twas the shepherd’s first Communion, ’twas his last *Viaticum*.

Morning dawned. The early sunbeams, lighting up that lowly shed,

Showed our Lady still in rapture ; at her feet the shepherd dead.

Yes, his simple heart had broken, in an ecstasy or joy,

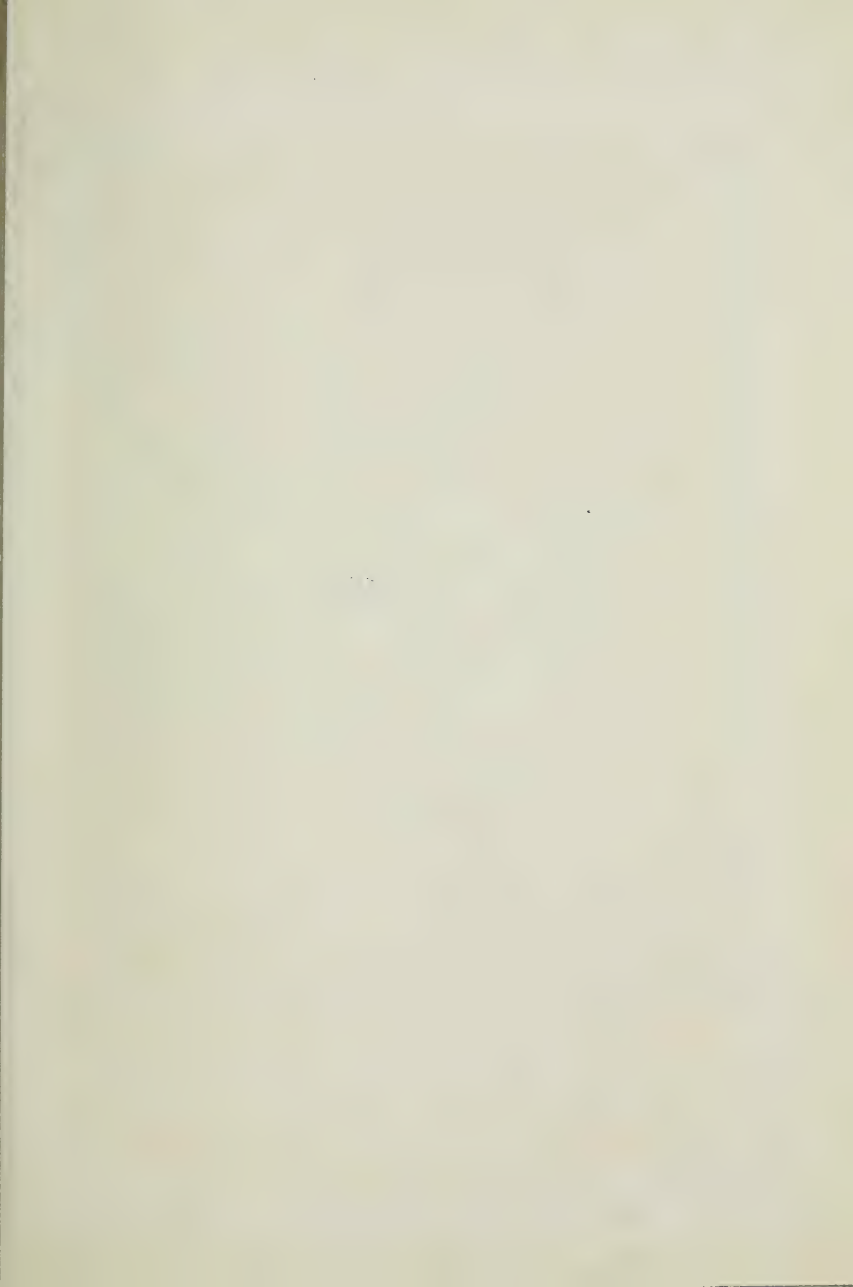
And the old man saw the sweet smile that had won the shepherd boy.”

We too have our Bethlehem to look back upon—the place where we were born, baptized, or brought up ; the place where a mother brought forth her firstborn child ; the place where we first learnt the Faith ; the home to which, as we get on in life, our thoughts so often turn ; the place which we revisit, perhaps, taking with us a child of another generation.

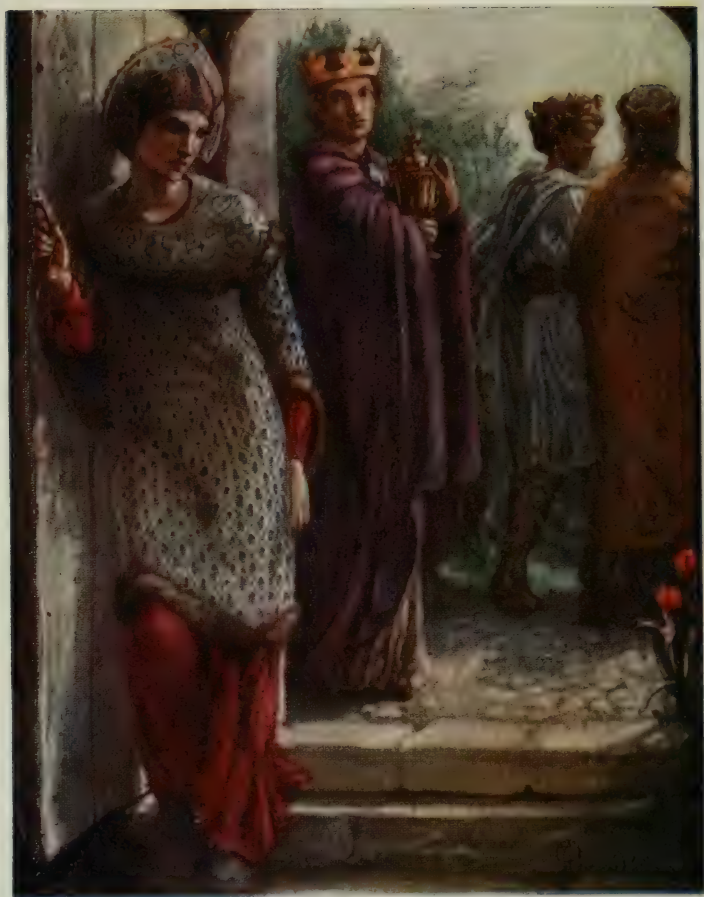
We remember how on his last voyage the thoughts of Christopher Columbus turned to Genoa his native place, how his last words before

he started were full of it : " Although my body is here my heart is always with you. I sail for the Indies in the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, but as I know I am but mortal I charge my son Don Diego, to pay you yearly and for ever the tenth part of all my revenue in order to lighten the toll on wine and corn. May the Most Holy Trinity guard your noble persons ! "

It is worth cherishing, this love for our Bethlehem ; for past places have their influence over present surroundings. We remember, and revisit them, in thought if not in reality—our first school, our old college, the church in which we were confirmed, or married, or made our first Communion ; the churchyard with our family graves ; the town or village in which we began to work in life. We do well. They are to us what in the legend Bethlehem was to the Mother and shepherd. We ourselves may know something of the longing to see them again, to make our communion where we made it ten, twenty, fifty, years ago—perhaps to receive our last communion where we received our first. And legend has its province even in suggesting such feelings as these. It may be sentiment ; but sentiment often plays no small part in the spiritual life and character.







*"I will come," she answered, 'but not now,' and the three kings passed along their way."*

## III

The Russian peasants have a legend that a woman called "the Baboushka" lived on the road which the Wise Men traversed

**The Legend of  
the Baboushka.**

on their way to the place where the young Child lay. "Come with us," they said, as they passed her cottage; "we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him." "I will come," she answered, "but not now," and the three kings passed along their way. Now when they had gone, she longed with a great longing to accompany them, and to see what they saw; but it was too late, and she never saw the CHRIST-Child. But, says the legend, she is still living and searching for Him. It is she, who, in the Russian houses, fills the stockings and dresses the tree on Christmas morning; and the children are awakened with the cry "Behold the Baboushka," and leap up, hoping to see her before she vanishes. She fancies, the legend goes, that in each poor little one whom she warms and feeds she may find the CHRIST-Child Whom she neglected years ago, and for His sake she takes care of all children. It may be pure legend, but here, if anywhere, the story teaches a deep, deep

truth, and legend mingles with Scripture, which teaches the eternal lesson: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

The Baboushka was both right and wrong. She was wrong. "I will come, but not now" has spoilt many a search for truth, and made many a conversion harder. It is like the "not now" of S. Augustine ("I will be pure, but not now") which caused him for many a day to miss the CHRIST-Child. But she was right—right to continue the search, right to do what she could, right to deny that her first chance was her last chance. True searchers for CHRIST are thwarted by no such words as "too late."

#### IV

Here is a legend of another kind—the legend of the sun-seekers. There is, in legend-land, a people living in a world which is divided into three countries, Cerulia, Rubia, and Flavia. Parsee-like, they all worship the sun. None could see the sun itself, but each worshipped it through the peculiar colour seen, as through a prism, by each—blue, red, or yellow. Each believed its own colour to be the only colour of the Deity.

**The Legend of  
the Sun-Seekers.**

“Cerulians see all things blue ;  
Through red the Rubians all view ;  
While Flavians indeed declare  
There’s nought but yellow in the air.”

Each country holds that none can approach  
the sun—

“Except along the path of light,  
Which each declares alone is right.”

And so each despises the other :

“The Flavians hate blue and red ;  
The Rubians all yellow dread ;  
Cerulians hate red and yellow,  
And each hates heartily his fellow.”

And this hatred extends to the very flora of the  
countries :

“Cerulians think roses rank ;  
While Rubians call daisies dank ;  
And Flavians the violet  
The foulest flower ever met.”

And even to their clothes :

“Cerulians of strictest sect,  
Will everything but blue reject,  
While Flavians in yellow dress,  
And both the Rubians distress.”

So they live their lives, each tenacious of its  
own creed, and each full of contempt for all  
who differ from them. At last one day a sage  
appears among them, and tries to put them  
right :

“And thus he told them when they died,  
And passed through prism to sun’s side,  
That there no colour e’er could be,  
But all would blend in harmony ;  
That sun would not one hue select  
And others utterly neglect.”

But he meets with the fate such sages usually  
do :

“Ceruleans and Rubians  
Combined, and all the Flavians,  
To scorn the sage who dared to teach  
Thoughts equally abhorred by each.”

Effort after effort he makes to teach them the  
truth, but all to no purpose :

“In vain the sage declared the light  
Which after death should meet their sight  
Would not be yellow, blue, or red,  
But white and glorious instead,  
A pure and everlasting blaze  
Of beautiful love-blended rays.”

Obstinately each clings to his own half-blind  
opinion, and each declared the sage a fool.

The teaching of the legend is on the surface.  
The sage was right, the people wrong :

“And yet the sage alone was right,  
Who saw, beyond, the one true light.”

Truth is only seen through prisms by the  
unit. Not until each sees the truth as seen by  
the whole will each grasp the fact that its own  
colour is only one hue in it, and must blend



with other colours before it can be called "the truth." Each has its own quota to contribute, and each will see more as it tries to see through the eyes of all. It is only the whole Church that can see the whole truth.

## V

Here, again, is a very simple legend from our garden, the legend of the glow-worm, and how it got its light.<sup>1</sup>

**The Legend of  
the Glow-Worm.**

The world lay very still and quiet in Bethlehem when JESUS CHRIST was born. And it was very cold, and Mary, who had an open stable for a shelter, and had taken all the hay she could find in which to wrap her dear One, could do nothing more. And presently there came an ox and an ass, and laid themselves down very close to the CHRIST-Child, and warmed Him with their warmth. Then some doves in the rafters of the stable came fluttering down, and spread their wings about Him, and nested Him with their feathers soft and warm. At length there came a tiny insect looking about to see what more could be done to warm the Divine Child; but, try as it would, it could find nothing worth doing, and it grieved sore that there was nothing for such

<sup>1</sup> Told by that great lover of legend, Mr. Stanhope Bailey.

a little thing to do. At last it managed, with immense effort and tireless labour, to drag a tiny dried-up flower to the crib, and to add it to the warmth of the hay which clothed the CHRIST-Child. And the Child stretched out His hand and touched the little insect in gratitude ; and as He touched it, a ray of moonlight crept through the rafters, and threw itself upon the insect as a blessing from above. And from that night, and in memory of this small act of kindness, the glow-worm has shone with light that is very soft and gentle, even as a ray of moonlight.

It is a simple legend, and to those who love the lovely it tells how the least thing done by the least of His little ones is accepted by the Holy Child ; how that, like the glow-worm, the doer of the deed shines for others to see and to imitate. Here, again, legend is but adding to the old Bible story, "She hath done what she could"—though not what she would.

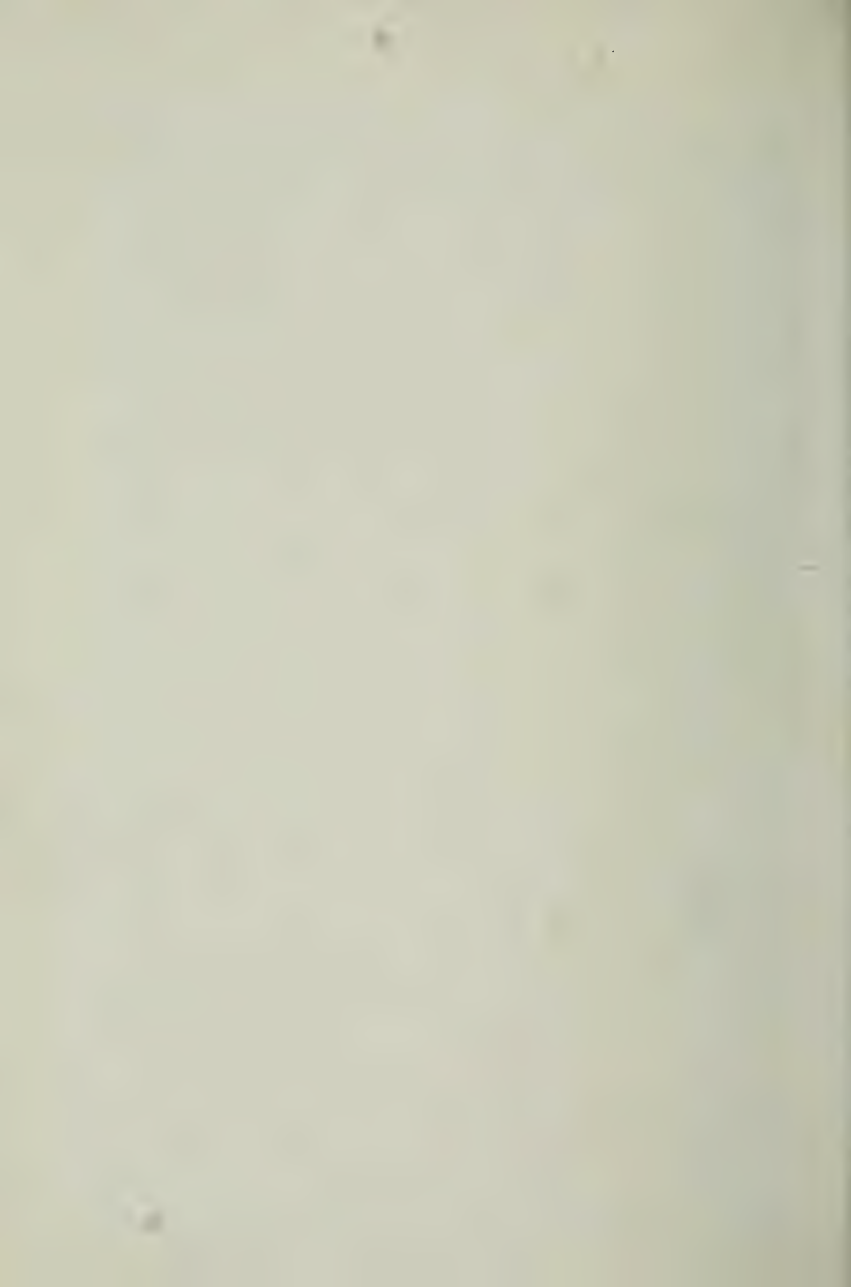
## VI

And how shall we speak of the numberless legends which surround "the wondrous Cross" and deck that sacred wood, the wood—

"Predestined in the birth of time to bear  
His gracious Form Who came to save and spare" ?



*"And the Child stretched out His hand and touched the little insect in gratitude."*



They seem endless, and — remembering that we are not dealing with Christian evidences or matters of faith—are suggestive of much beauty.

**Legends of the Holy Cross.**

Reaching right back to the Fall, legend sees the original beam of the Cross in Eden, in a branch of the Tree of Life—a beam which, cut down and preserved, will some day form the saving plank in Noah's ark :

“And in the ark that floats them safe and fair  
A plank from that strange Tree the freight shall bear.”

Next, it is used to support the tent of Abraham when entertaining angels unawares.

“Thereafter, planted in a southern land,  
With fresher leaf, and growth renewed to stand,  
It screens a patriarch's tent upon the plains,  
And shades the angel-guests he entertains.”

Then we find it used as a board in the wood-work of the Temple :

“Cut, planed, and deftly fashioned to a board  
That roofs, in pride, the Temple of the LORD.”

And then, as time goes on, it is seen in the Pool of Bethesda :

“For ages in those shallows to remain  
Half-bare and half-submerged—but not in vain,  
For soon the troubled waters shall reveal  
Its virtue, conscious of their power to heal.”



For in legend the holy beam is the source of the fountain from whence spring those four healing streams which water the whole earth—religion (which is love), philosophy, mysticism, and medicine.

And so from age to age the story spreads, until at last the beam becomes the wood from which the Cross of CHRIST is cut.

“Faithful Tree, above all other,  
One and only noble Tree,  
None in foliage, none in blossom,  
None in fruit thy peer may be :  
Sweetest wood, and sweetest iron ;  
Sweetest Weight is hung on thee.”

It is, of course, all legend, and nothing but legend. It is the creeper clinging about the Tree of the Cross ; but for us the legend, or rather that which the legend stands for, has a deep and living truth. For us the Cross of CHRIST is indeed a branch of the Tree of Life, a plank in the saving ark of the Church, a board in the spiritual temple, a spring in Bethesda's healing stream, the Holy Well of the wounded side.

But legend does not stop here. It is busy with the after history of the wood of the Cross—sometimes as legend pure and simple, sometimes as legend interlacing with tradition. Buried on Golgotha, the holy Cross is found by S. Helena,

who travels to Calvary at the age of sixty-three to seek the precious relic. Finding all three crosses, and puzzled as to which the real one is, she takes them all—so runs the tale—to a sick person, who is healed by a touch of the true Cross. Then follows its after history. Part of it is given to the Bishop of Jerusalem, to be treasured in the holy city; part is sent to Constantinople, to find its way at last to Paris, and be lodged, as it is asserted, in the Sainte Chapelle; other parts are sent to Rome, to be deposited in the Church of the Holy Cross in the imperial city.

Two festivals are celebrated in its honour in our Prayer Book Kalendar, in common with the whole of the Western Church—"The *Invention*<sup>1</sup> (or finding) of the Cross," by S. Helena, on May 3rd, and *Holy Cross Day*, or the exaltation of the Cross, on September 14th, when we commemorate the uplifting of the holy Cross by Constantine in his new basilica, to be seen and meditated upon by all true lovers of the Cross.

Both festivals have their spiritual message to us. First there is May 3rd, the finding of the *true* cross in our own lives—no such easy matter when so many self-made crosses abound. Grace is never promised for the self-

<sup>1</sup> See *In Watchings Off*, pp. 77-84.

carved cross. Self-invented crosses are but spurious imitations of the God-sent cross, and carry with them no healing power. And as in legend, so in life, the test of the true Cross will be found in its healing power. The true Cross will heal, not harm ; it is only the sham cross that harms or hinders.

Then there is September 14th—the exaltation, or uplifting, or exposition of the True Cross in **September 14th.** our own crosses that others may see them and be the better for them—a very real item in the hidden life. Even our crosses are to be used for others, if only to give them the priceless chance of helping us to bear them. No man liveth to himself, even in his crossbearing.

“For he who thinks to stand alone,  
Alone shall surely fall :  
Our very woes are not our own,  
But held in trust for all.”

May 3rd and September 14th must ever go together in the soul's calendar of holy days.

We may well treasure the legends of the Cross (within, of course, the province assigned to legend) if they teach us, among other lessons, to defend the Faith which the Cross stands for—even as, of old, soldiers drew their swords in church at the recitation of the Apostles' Creed,

as it declared how He, the Figure on the Cross, "was crucified, dead, and buried, and the third day rose again from the dead." And does not the soldier's sword itself remind us by its cross-shaped handle how men fixed it in the ground and knelt before it in homage to the Crucified, or raised it to their lips and kissed the handle (the origin of the officer's salute) as an act of devotion to Him Whose Cross it so practically symbolized? Our more simple-hearted forefathers loved to remind themselves of the Holy Cross in many a symbol forgotten by us—such as in the dagger used to direct our attention to a footnote in a book, and originally used in Church service books to show the priest where to make the sign of the Cross<sup>1</sup>; or in the Criss-Cross, or CHRIST'S Cross, placed at the beginning of school books, to remind the learner that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"; or in the churchyard or market cross, round which the preaching friar would gather his rustic hearers, whose words might perchance keep clean the buying and selling which took place around the very same cross as soon as the service was over. So they saw, in legend, that old story of the Cross which drove them by its beauty to the love of the Crucified.

<sup>1</sup> This explains the expression "God save the mark."

## VII

Another legend is helpful as it is familiar. How did the birds begin to fly? How did they get their wings? Legend gives the answer. First God made the body of the bird without the wings; there it lay, wingless and inert, on the ground from which it was taken, earth-bound by its own weight. Then God made a wing; but that only made matters worse, for it added to the burden of the poor bird's body, weighing it down still more heavily. And yet another burden was in store for it. God made another wing, and added that to the heavily-weighted body. Heavier and heavier grew the bird—when lo! its weights become its wings, and the added burdens are the powers which bear it aloft. The weights are the very means whereby the bird is enabled to fly.

It is a pretty legend, and has a meaning true to life. Some of us have learnt that our very burdens are the wings with which we fly from the low level of the earthbound. The story of the birds is our own story. Once we grovelled on the earth, too heavy to rise. Burden after burden was added, and then, when we thought we could bear no more, some new burden came along, and seemed to make us heavier and more

**The Legend  
of the Birds.**



helpless than ever. And then, just when we were giving in, we found in the weight the very power we needed to rise and to live in higher, rarer air. It is so all through life. We learn to love our weights—weights which we *have* to bear, whether we will or not. As we bear them they bear us, and raise us higher than we could ever have risen without them. And so we know something of the inner meaning of Tennyson's thought :

“But this it was that made me feel .  
As light as carrier birds in air,  
I loved the weight I had to bear,  
Because it needed help of love.”

Our weights are our wings.

### VIII

A sweet little legend which tells of the  
unselfishness of the CHRIST-Child  
**The Christ-Child** is worth teaching to children in  
**and the Roses.** an age when “give, not get,” or  
“get to give,” is so sadly out of fashion.

“Once long ago, the legend saith,  
A Child there lived in Nazareth.

And in His little garden there  
The roses blossomed rich and fair.

And when His roses blossomed well  
That Child went forth, His friends to tell.

To each companion of His play  
He gave a lovely rose that day.

Then said His playmates unto Him,  
O CHRIST-Child 'tis a foolish whim ;

See all Thy rose-trees are bereft,  
For Thine own self no flower is left !

'Take ye the flowers,' He said, 'for see !  
The plant hath other fruit for Me.'

And His sweet brow He did adorn  
That CHRIST-Child with a crown of thorn."

## IX

How was suspicion born ? How did it grow ?  
Legend takes us back to the Garden of Eden for  
a reply. In Longfellow's legend  
**The Dead Lambs** of the dead lambs is found its  
**(the Beginning** origin. The sentence of death,  
**of Suspicion).** hitherto unknown, save on herb  
and flower, has just been passed on our first  
parents, and for the first time in their lives  
Adam and Eve have seen death at work in the  
animal world.

"Death, though already in the world, as yet  
Had only tried his timorous tooth to whet  
On grass and leaves."

But not content with this, he attacks the  
animal life :

"And in a cold spring night  
Two weanling lambs first perished from his bite.

The bleatings of their dam at break of day  
Drew to the spot where her dead lambkins lay  
The other beasts. They, understanding not,  
In wistful silence round that fatal spot  
Stood eyeing the dead lambs with looks forlorn.  
Adam who was upon the march that morn,  
Saw the two frozen lambkins lying dead,  
But understood not. At last he said  
'Since the lambs cannot move, methinks 'twere best  
That I should carry them.'  
So on his breast  
He laid their little bodies and again  
Set forward, followed o'er the frosty plain  
By his bewildered flocks."

And the legend tells how lamb after lamb dies  
till they become too many to be carried. And  
then comes Eve with the suggestion that the  
fleece of the dead lambs would make warm  
garments for them both.

Adam argues that they are but sleeping and  
will wake again. But Eve :

"'They are not sleeping, Adam. They are dead.'  
'Dead? What is that?' 'I know not. But I know  
That they no more can feel the north wind blow,  
Nor the sun burn. They cannot hear the bleat  
Of their own mothers, cannot suffer heat,  
Or cold, or thirst, or weariness,  
Or want again.' 'How dost thou know all this?'  
Asked Adam. And Eve whispered in his ear,  
'The serpent told me.'"

And once again Adam does as he is bid, and—

"Next morning, to the beasts' surprise,  
Adam and Eve appeared before their eyes  
In woollen fleeces warmly garmented."

But then the thought comes to the beasts—  
What about ourselves? Will they not want  
our lives to clothe themselves in skins to keep  
them warm?

“And to the beasts, who were as they were born,  
It seemed a scandal and a sort of sin  
That their own wool and fur should thus be worn  
By limbs not theirs. ‘Let each defend his skin,’  
They said to one another.”

And then comes the result—suspicion.

One little animal there was which Eve loved  
passing well, and lived with it in the mutual  
confidence born from ignorance of fear. But—  
oh! the great, sad “but”—

“But when the herd discovered that her dress  
Was stolen from their plundered kith and kin,  
Eve’s little favourite feared each fresh caress  
Her hand bestowed on it, and felt within  
Its frightened heart a sharp mistrustfulness.  
For, ‘If she took a fancy to my skin?’  
The creature mused. And ever from that date  
Its thoughts and looks were all alert to find  
Some means whereby it might escape the fate  
Whose horrid prospect hovered vague behind  
Eve’s fondling fingers.”

And so suspicion, with its miserable results,  
crept into creation, and perhaps more than any  
one sin save its twin-sister jealousy, is responsible  
for more spoilt lives than any other twenty  
reasons put together.

## X

Who that knows the sins connected with the love of jewellery, the crimes committed to obtain it, the part it plays in the lives of thousands, can fail to see a meaning in the legend which attributes to the serpent the first suggestion of evil in that which is good, or to half-believe the old legend in which he coils himself round the first woman in shape of necklace, girdle, clasp, bracelet?

**The Legend of  
Eve's Jewels.**

Eve is growing old and fears lest she should lose her beauty—at least in Adam's eyes. And the serpent, ever at hand, offers to make her as beautiful as when she was young.

“‘Canst make me young again?’ ‘Not that.’ ‘But how, When young no more, to make thee fair again I know a way.’ ‘What way?’ said Eve. ‘Explain!’ ‘It is,’ he answered, ‘by adorning thee.’ ‘And what wouldst thou adorn me with?’ she said. ‘Myself,’ he whispered.”

“*Myself!*” There was the root of misused adornment.

“Then the serpent rolled  
His ruby coloured scales and coils of gold  
Around the form of Eve: her neck enlaced  
And was a necklace: girt her pliant waist,  
And was a girdle: with repeated twist  
Of twinkling chain entwined her tender wrist  
And was a bracelet. Last fall, her brow  
He crowned, and cried, ‘Man’s queen, I hail thee now!’”

*Absit omen!*



## CHAPTER VIII

*ARTHURIAN LEGENDS*

It would be difficult to speak of legend, sacred or secular, without any allusion to the perfect rosary of legends which surround the Court of King Arthur. The *Morte d'Arthur*, or *Death of Arthur*, which Professor Freeman calls "a fine prose romance, or rather collection of romances, about Arthur and his knights, founded upon French fictions," takes a unique place in the life of legend. We are debtors both to Sir Thomas Malory, who composed it, and to Caxton, who printed it.

No one will deny that the Arthurian legends have done much to train and refine the imagination, and we must find a place for one, or more—surely "sacred legends" in the best sense of the word. Take one: Sir Galahad.

## I

Sir Galahad is Tennyson's "bright boy knight," the youngest, happiest knight in all

King Arthur's Court ; knight "of men and maiden true" ; knight of the young Sir Galahad. and fresh and pure. Galahad is our fancy knight, the "white knight" who has captured our imagination, and won us to the ideal. Poet and painter (Tennyson and Watts) have shown us the inner meaning of the story, and the teaching of the legend—a legend too well known to repeat in detail.

And what is the teaching of the legend ? It is the strength of purity. So the painter hints in Watts's picture of "Galahad," and so the poet sings in Tennyson's "Holy Grail" :

"My strength is as the strength of ten,  
Because my heart is pure."

Strength ! It is not the animal strength seen in the burly form of the figure in Watts's "Greed and Labour" ; nor is it the higher strength of aspiration seen in the upturned face of "The Rider on the Red Horse" ; nor yet the perfect muscular strength of the youthful rider in his "Physical Energy." It is the highest strength of all—the strength which painters, past and present, have loved to suggest in pictures of S. John the Divine, that strange strength which seems to combine manhood and womanhood ("neither the man without

the woman, neither the woman without the man"<sup>1</sup>) in one, the strength of purity.

Only contrast the real strength of Galahad with the pitiable weakness of Launcelot :

“My good blade carves the casques of men,  
My tough lance thrusteth sure.”

So sings Sir Galahad, joyous in the very fight, full of undying vitality in his mystic war with sin.

And then Sir Launcelot ! Launcelot, who has lost his purity, and soiled “his maiden sword” ! Launcelot, in whom there lived a sin :

“So strange, of such a kind that all of pure,  
Noble, and knightly in him turned and clung  
Round that one sin !”

Launcelot, a very Capernaum in his fall ! Is not his, indeed, the song of the sad ?—

“There was I beaten down by little men,  
Mean knights to whom the moving of my sword  
And shadow of my spear had been enow'  
To scare them from me once.”

Samson-like, he had lost his strength because he lost his purity. Poor Sir Launcelot ! And yet how we love him ! love him even in his fall ! Is it that our own strength has so often become a minus quantity, lost because we cannot say with Galahad, “My heart is pure” ?

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 11.

If so, Watts has given another great picture of strength for every Launcelot: "The Prodigal." It is a very strong face, though it is the strength of penitence rather than that of purity. It is *not* Sir Galahad, though in it peers "some far-off likeness" to Sir Galahad; for penitence has a strange twin look with purity, though lacking that which purity alone can give.

Galahad alone is the knight of the pure, the picture of the beatitude "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," for it is the sight of God which is reflected in the soul of the pure.

The legend, then, teaches us the strength which comes through purity. It depicts purity as a positive virtue, as something which has its active as well as its positive side. It says, "Purity is something far higher than the mere negation of its opposite: virtue is something far greater than 'not vice': white means something much more than 'not black': heaven is something infinitely grander than 'not hell.'"

And notice. Purity, in life as in legend, has two great gifts: it sees visions; it hears voices.

Purity sees visions. It sees the invisible in the visible, the ultimate in the present, the Holy Grail in the common bread:

"I, Galahad, saw the Grail,  
I saw the fiery face, as of a Child,  
That smote itself into the bread."

And purity hears voices :

"I saw the Holy Grail, and heard a cry—  
O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow Me."

Follow Me—the CHRIST. Have an ideal—  
and dare to have the highest :

"Live pure, speak true, right wrong,  
Follow the CHRIST, the King,  
Else wherefore born?"

Surely legend here has fulfilled its true province—to teach through the imagination. Granting there was no such being as Sir Galahad; assuming that Sir Launcelot was non-existent; admitting that Arthur himself is a creature of the imagination; conceding that all were simple inventions of the Norman romance writers, yet, if the legend has only taught us the power of purity, it has done its work. For it has inspired us with an ideal, an ideal to reach up to :

"And one there was among us, ever moved  
Among us in white armour, Galahad."

To move about the world "in white armour," to keep the white flag flying, to scatter purity like lilies in a world where so much is soiled and seamy—this is a vocation in itself,



this is that which multiplies the power of each one on the plain by the strength of the 144,000 on the mount, as it is written :

“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with Him an hundred and forty and four thousand. . . . These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. . . . And in their mouth was found no guile : for they are without fault before the throne of GOD.<sup>1</sup>” And so the legend merges into truth.

## II

Thoughts of death, and after death, have been strangely enriched by legends ; and by none more beautifully than by the legend of the death of King Arthur.

**The Death, and after  
Death, of Arthur.**

We all remember the story of “The Bloody Bridge,” or the ford across the Camel, and the fierce battle of Camlan between Arthur and Modred—a battle in which only three of Arthur’s knights survived : one because he was so ugly that all shrank from attacking him, thinking him the devil ; another because he was so beautiful that all shrank from touching him, thinking him an angel ; and a third because he

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xiv. i. sq.

was too strong to be attacked by any. The legend is told in many a quaint old ballad, dating from the Percy MSS.;—and thus it runs :

“On Trinity Monday in the morn,  
This sore battle was doomed to be;  
When many a knight cried, ‘Well—away,’  
Alack! It was the more pitie.”

But both sides forbade their troops to strike a blow until the signal—a drawn sword—should be given by their leaders :

“The king he chargèd all his host,  
In readiness there for to be;  
But no man should no weapon stir,  
Unless a sword drawn they should see.”

And so with Modred, for neither trusted the other :

“For he durst not his uncle trust,  
Nor he his nephew sooth to tell;  
Alack! it was a woeful case,  
As e’er in Christentie befell.”

And then the legend tells how an adder stung a knight on the knee, with dire results to all :

“An adder crept forth from a bush,  
Stung one of the knights on the knee;  
Alack! It was a woeful chance,  
As ever was in Christentie.”

For when the knight felt the adder, he drew his sword from the scabbard, and unconsciously gave the signal for the battle to begin :

“For when the two hosts saw the sword  
They joined battle instantly ;  
Till of so many noble knights,  
On one side there were left but three.

Upon King Arthur's own party,  
Only himself escapèd there,  
And Lukyn, Duke of Gloster, free,  
And the king's butler, Bedevere.”

And so the battle ends ; Modred and Arthur meet afterwards in personal conflict, Modred receiving his own death wound, and, in turn, wounding the king to death.

The after story is familiar to us all. Arthur commissioned Sir Lukyn, one of his knights, to fling his sword, Caliburn, or Excalibar, into the lake, and when the knight obeyed, an arm rises out of the water, seizes the sword, and draws it under the lake :

“A hand and arm did meet the sword,  
And flourished three times in the air ;  
Then sunk beneath the running stream  
And by the duke was seen no mair.”

Upon this Arthur enters a boat in which were Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, and others, who bear him away to an unknown land. Sir Lukyn seeks him, but finds him gone :

“But to what place he could not tell,  
For never after he did him spy ;  
But he saw a barge go from the land,  
And he heard ladies howl and cry.

And whether the king were there or not  
He never knew, nor ever colde ;  
For from that sad and direful day  
He never more was seen on mould."

So runs ballad and legend, and legend adds that he was carried to the Isle of Avalon, where he was healed of his wound, and from whence he will one day return to take part in a last great battle, and to resume his throne.

Meanwhile, he is left in Avalon, "The Land of the Living," sitting with his warriors in some charmed place, waiting for the trumpet of recall. Arthur waits, but never dies.

Translated into Church teaching, the legend describes the battle, death, and flight of the soul, and its after abode in the land of the living ; still alive, and waiting for the trumpet to sound—"for the trumpet shall sound"—which is to summon it to take its part in Armageddon,<sup>1</sup> the last great battle with evil.

It is well to think of our dead as alive ; to picture them waiting for us "in Avalon" to join them and so ensure their "perfect consummation and bliss." It is well to remember that they without us cannot be made perfect. It is well to remember that they thus give us something to do for them, that they expect

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xvi. 16.

something from us, and crave for the growth of their beloved till they are fit to join them in the land of visions. It is well to remember that we are all waiting, living and departed, for that last and final "Armageddon," whatever it may mean, when the battle cry will be, "Behold, He cometh with clouds," and when, as the clouds roll away and the smoke of the battle clears, the central vision will be the vision of the Victor, "the crowned LORD of all."



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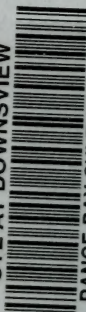








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